



Child Wonder

Roy Jacobsen

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Winner of the prestigious Norwegian Booksellers' Prize

A Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Selection (Holiday 2011)

A glorious evocation of a Norwegian childhood in the early sixties by an author short-listed for the 2009 Dublin IMPAC Award

Little Finn lives with his mother in an apartment in a working-class suburb of Oslo. Life is a struggle to make ends meet, but he does not mind. When his mother decides to take a lodger to help pay the bills, he watches with interest as she freshens up their small apartment with new wallpaper and a sofa paid for in installments. He befriends their new male lodger, whose television is more tempting to him than his mother would like.

When a half sister whom he never knew joins the household, Finn takes her under his wing over an everlasting summer on Håøya Island. But he can't understand why everyone thinks his new sister is so different from every other child. Nor can he fathom his mother's painful secret, one that pushes them ever farther apart. As summer comes to a close, Finn must attempt to grasp the incomprehensible adult world and his place within it.

Child Wonder is a powerful and unsentimental portrait of childhood. Roy Jacobsen, through the eyes of a child, has produced an immensely uplifting novel that shines with light and warmth.

Child Wonder Details

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From Reader Review Child Wonder for online ebook

Artak Aleksanyan says

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Jill says

Navigating that shaky bridge between childhood and adulthood is never easy, particularly in 1961 – a time when “men became boys and housewives women,” a year when Yuri Gagarin is poised to conquer space and when the world is on the cusp of change.

Into this moment of time, Norwegian author Roy Jacobsen shines a laser light on young Finn and his mother Gerd, who live in the projects of Oslo. Fate has not been kind to them: Gerd's husband, a crane operator, divorced her and then died in an accident, leaving the family in a financially precarious position. To make ends meet, she works in a shoe store and runs an ad for a lodger for extra money.

To complicate the situation, Finn's father's second wife – a now-widowed drug addict – views the ad and unloads on the family Finn's half-sister, Linda – a young girl who appears to have mysterious problems that are only gradually revealed. Figuratively, this “poor mite got off the Grorud bus one dark November day with an atomic bomb in a small light blue suitcase and turned our lives upside down.”

Linda becomes the mirror in which Gerd, Finn, and others (including the lodger Kristian) eventually define themselves. Gerd, who identifies strongly with Linda, is transported back to an abusive childhood and views herself in the little girl. Finn battles jealousy, bewilderment, and eventually, stirrings of love as he defends Linda from the Norwegian educational system and the school bullies. He reminisces: "Linda was not of this world, one day I would come to understand this – she was a Martian come down to earth to speak in tongues to heathens, to speak French to Norwegians and Russian to Americans. She was destiny, beauty and a

catastrophe. A bit of everything. Mother's mirror and Mother's childhood. All over again."

Not unlike his regional compatriot, Per Petterson, Roy Jacobsen is (as one publication stated about the latter), "a master at writing the spaces between people." He succinctly and beautifully captures the incomprehension of a young boy who is trying to make sense of the adult world and his place within it. The increasing bond between the boy and his accidental sister is explored painstakingly and is exquisitely poignant. The portrayal of Linda's evolution to her new family is genuinely heartrendering.

A pedestrian if not downright awkward translation does not serve the stream of consciousness sections well. In the best translations (such as the talented Ann Born's translation of Per Petterson's *Out Stealing Horses*), the reader loses sight that the book is a translation. It takes a little while to get into the cadence and the rhythm.

But the authenticity of Roy Jacobsen's vision wins out with its universal themes: how others become gifts in our lives, unveiling us, and the lengths we go to preserve relationships with those we love. Or, in the words of the author, Something happens to you when someone spots you – you see yourself from the outside, your own peculiar strangeness, that which is only you and moves in only you, but which nonetheless you have not known..." This quiet book is a hopeful testimony to transformative change.

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"Child Wonder" is the story of a boy, his widowed mother, and her reckless decision to take her stepdaughter into their household.

There is something not quite right with the little girl: "Linda was not of this world," the child narrator, Finn, tells us, "one day I would come to understand this -- she was a Martian come down to earth to speak in tongues to heathens, French to Norwegians and Russian to Americans."

Her ailment is developmental, in the head, but never fully revealed by the author, a practice he applies to other issues haunting the family throughout the length of the piece.

Sensing the profile of these issues, while never being fed a full rasher of details, creates a degree of dramatic tension, though the real purpose may be to put us on equal footing with the story's children, around whom it truly revolves.

The kids do not know everything that goes on around them, nor does the reader, which may or may not be a good thing.

There is not much of plot to "Child Wonder." It covers the year after Linda moves in, measures the growing distance between Finn and his inscrutable mom, and their interaction with a lodger whom circumstances have forced upon them.

The book wanders, meanders, not tied down to the usual overarching plot and cohort of subtexts; a series of events that unfold and build up, sort of, to the ending, and author Roy Jacobson is in no hurry to divulge them.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. It's just so you know.

If you've read your fair share of dysfunctional family dramas, the real novelty to "Child Wonder" may turn out to be where it is situated. The novel unfolds in Norway, which renders it, for the uninitiated, something of a passport to a small country not very much in the headlines, but worthy of revelation to the curious among us.

For certain, you'll not recognize "the old style swimming belts, lined with reindeer fur," nor the heavily public and collective way people exist with one another, in the 1960s, as post-World War II Europe begins to spread its economic wings.

The translation's English is England's English. You may have to skate over the fact Finn has a "quiff," although this and other expressions not common to stateside usage lend a touch of color to the white, frozen, and crystallized backdrop across which the tale is writ.

"Child Wonder," will not blow you away, shock you out of your shoes, or haunt you long. Its impact is indirect, its motives and purpose well below the surface of the page, working hard to demonstrate what becomes of our hearts and souls with age.

Heba says

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Ahmed says

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Yara Habib says

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Nahed.E says

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Pe?ivo says

Ostrov, Bílý oceán, D?eva?i - geniální. Možná proto jsem si bezmyšlenkovit? koupil i Zázra?né dít? abych byl následn? potrestán tímto literárním bi?em p?es moje holá, mužn? svalnatá, opálená, ?tená?ská záda. To je pane?ku slohový útvar!

Zázra?né dít? je p?íb?h z po?atku sedmdesátých let z Norska. Finnovi je 8, vyr?stá sám s matkou na sídlišti a jednoho dne se u nich zjeví jeho nevlastní sestra Linda, který je 6 a všichni si o ní myslí, že je lehce imbecilní, protože oblíbené zví?e její biologické matky byl tule?. A ten se norsky ?ekne toluen. A její matka k n?mu ráda ?uchala. Bože, seberte mi n?kdo tu klávesnici.

Pomalu za?ne vyplouvat na povrch, že to matka Finna nem?la v život? jednoduchý, že otec obou d?tí zmizel jak pára nad toluenem a že její vlastní d?ství nebylo v?bec harmonický. Linda za?ne chodit do školy, za?ne šikana, Finn se za?ne chovat jako brácha, celý je to o jeho dospívání a vztahu k sest?e a matce a matka nechce už být sama a hledá si partnera a má špatný rodiný vztahy a celý je to strašn? ho?kosladký a trochu smutný a takhle n?jak si p?edstavuju knížky od Jarchovskýho.

Sice chodím v tejdnu spát p?ed desátou a nosím doma ba?kory, ale tohle je na m? p?esp?íliš. 3/10.

Håvard Bjørnelv says

En verdig "oppfølger" til Seierherrene. Stemninga, omgivelsene og tida er den samme som i storromanen fra 1991, samtidig er her mye nytt. I tillegg til nok et tilbakeblikk til 60-tallets arbeidersamfunn, denne gang fra synspunktet til en ung gutt uten far og dermed med en arbeidende mor, byr "vidunderbarn" også på problemstillinger som er like dagsaktuelle i dag; mobbing, overgrep og den generelle kampen for tilværelsen. Roy Jacobsen befester sin posisjon som en av Norges beste samtidsforfattere.

Outi says

Absolutely amazing, it grew slowly but steadily on me, drew me into it's powerful depiction of child's mindset in a world not so reliable and steady.

The main character Finn was charming. He was brave, smart and humble and tried so hard to keep everything flowing softly and help his mother and half-sister. The way Jacobsen wrote about how Finn and his mother slowly drift apart and Finn's childhood starts to end was the best part to me, the little pieces of un-innocence, adulthood and independence crept into Finn's world and got me close to tears many times.

The best books take your breath away, depress you a little in a sort of good way and make you marvel the excellence of the writer. This book did all that and more.

Zahra says

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Osama says

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